High school seniors’ knowledge base of nursing and its effects on recruitment

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Abstract
Nursing in the US is an ever changing field. There are opportunities everywhere you go and the learning never ceases. With new evidence and technology being presented everyday, nurses are asked to adapt. Despite the endless possibilities in nursing, the profession is still experiencing a shortage. Even worse is that nursing schools are noticing a drop in enrollment trends and so the gap between positions and the labor pool amplifies. This study seeks to determine what high school seniors know about nursing as a profession and if their knowledge level has an effect on their decisions to become nurses. Findings will hopefully help determine where recruitment strategies are most lacking and suggestions for change.

Keywords: Knowledge, Attitudes, High school seniors’

LITERATURE REVIEW
Although the number of registered nurses in the United States is currently increasing, the gap between RNs and RN positions continues to widen. The Bureau of Labor Statistics claims that Registered Nurses are projected to create the second largest number of new jobs among all occupations. This growth in not being reflected by enrollment into RN education programs. Many factors are thought to contribute to this decline in enrollment, including negative attitudes toward the profession, misinformation about the profession, and a general lack of knowledge.

Several of the negative attitudes perceived about the nursing profession include that education is unaffordable and takes too long, that working conditions are unpleasant, that is has a low social status, and that it is not well paid (Kohler & Edwards, 1990). Although these negative attitudes most likely have some impact on the nursing shortage, Al-Kandari and Lew (2005) found that despite the fact that many positive attitudes were projected in their findings, there was still little interest among the sample in perusing the profession.

Many studies have looked into where high school students get their information about nursing and how valid this information is. About 9% of students in a study by Erickson, Holm, Chelminiak, and Ditomassi (2005) reported that they have been influenced by nurses in the media and 79% of those reported that this media exposure made their opinion more favorable. Kohler and Edwards (1990) reported that 33.9% of their respondents obtained most of their views about nursing from observing a nurse, 29.4% from watching television, and a meager 2.71% from school.
These sources of information may account for the severe lack of knowledge about nursing found among high school students (Stevens and Walker, 1993). Rossiter, Foong, and Chan (1999) found that only 50% of respondents knew that nursing care is based on scientific knowledge and that nursing includes promoting and maintaining health; only 34% knew that nurses plan individual care in collaboration with patients.

According to these studies, the RN education program enrollment shortage is most overwhelmingly caused by a lack of knowledge provided from within the schools for high school students. One suggestion to improve this deficit is to increase the use of technology, such as online courses, digital hospitals, humanoid robots, simulation laboratories, and distance learning, such as, classroom lectures and dialogue being transmitted through mobile devices (Neuman, 2006). A study of the opinions of high school career advisors showed that these advisors need more help from outside licensed health professionals to promote health occupations (Alexander and Fraser, 2000).

AIMS OF THE STUDY

Purpose
The purpose of this study was to determine the knowledge base of high school seniors regarding nursing as they have had the most exposure to information prior to choosing nursing as a career. Through the determination of this knowledge the researchers hope to extrapolate the effectiveness of current recruitment strategies.

Research Question
Does lack of knowledge decrease students’ choice of nursing as a career?

METHOD

Sample and Setting
A convenience sample consisting of a Georgia public high school twelfth grade homeroom classes was taken. A group of 98 seniors from selected Georgia high schools were polled.

Instrument
The instrument used was “Survey on Nursing” by Scott Cody, Keven Keller, Sara Leikam, Courtney Nelson, and Cassandra Riggle. This survey looked at two points of demographic information, whether the participant was considering nursing as a career, source of participant’s information about nursing, and 14 questions on a five-point likert scale. The 14 questions examined the participant’s knowledge of nursing.

Procedure
Letters were sent out to the school boards in Troup, Dekalb, and Gwinnett and principals requesting access to the different senior classes. Once permission was obtained from the school, a time was set up for the surveys to be administered. Teachers provided both the surveys and the consent forms to the participants. The teachers then read the disclosure letter so as to avoid any bias. Once read, surveys were passed out and then completed and placed in manila envelopes and sealed. A consent form was also included explaining participant rights, and as students were seventeen and above they can comprehend and
sign for themselves. The exclusion criteria consists of incomplete surveys, below age seventeen, illiterate students, non-English speaking students, and those students who are seniors not by classification.

*Classification refers to the number of credit hours necessary, as mandated by individual institutions, to place students in a specific grade levels.

**Data analysis**

Once the data was collected, the information was transposed to Microsoft Excel where answers were averaged and the information analyzed. The surveys that were held in manila envelopes were then shredded and discarded. The computer file utilized in Microsoft Excel was removed from the computer hard drive and deleted upon completion of analysis.

**RESULTS**

**Demographics**

A total of 98 surveys were received; however, six were incomplete and discarded. Half (46) of the remaining participants were female and half (46) were male. Forty-five of the 92 were African American and 47 were White. Approximately 17% stated that they were considering nursing as a career; 80% stated that they were not considering nursing as a career; and 3% stated that they were undecided. The source of information about nursing was most commonly cited as family however all sources were mentioned fairly evenly.

**Analysis**

The 14 Likert scale items were divided into two categories: Positive Opinion Questions (POQ), questions from which an agree response was expected, and Negative Opinion Questions (NOQ), questions from which a disagree response was expected. Nine of the items were categorized as POQ and five were categorized as NOQ. Point values were assigned to each response for analytical purposes. Strongly Agree was assigned a value of 2 points, Agree was 1 point, Neutral was 0 points, Disagree was -1 point, and Strongly Disagree was -2 points. The average response of females to POQs was 1.28 signifying a response of agree to strongly agree. The results indicate that while there is a relatively high positive opinion of nursing among both male and female respondents, there is also a substantial negative opinion. Males’ overall opinion appears to be slightly more negative. Compared to other respondents, students who stated that they were considering nursing as a career had a higher average POQ score and a lower average NOQ score.

**CONCLUSION**

The frequency of affirmative responses to negative questions suggests that many high school students do not have an adequate knowledge base of the nursing profession. The results cited above indicate that participants who were considering nursing as a career may have more accurate knowledge of the nursing profession. While much more research is needed on the subject, these results suggest that by increasing high school students’ knowledge of nursing, schools may increase the number of students who pursue nursing as a career, thus decreasing the nursing shortage.
REFERENCES


